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SENSITIVE  
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DEPT FOR AF/E-MBEYZEROV AND INR

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: REGIONAL CONFERENCES CONSOLIDATE POWER OF  
ILLEGAL TRANSITION REGIME

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Malagasy "High Transition Authority" (HAT) held regional conferences in each of the country's 22 regions from June 30 to July 3. The agenda focused on changing the constitution; setting up the fourth republic; reforming political parties, communication, and electoral laws; and promoting national reconciliation. Resolutions made during these regional conferences are to be discussed during the national conference scheduled - at the moment - to be held by the end of July. The three other political movements involved in the SADC/AU/UN negotiations - TIM/Ravalomanana, Zafy, and Ratsiraka - boycotted the not-so-neutral conferences which they viewed as the illegal transition regime's latest attempt to further entrench its de facto hold over the country. END SUMMARY.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

¶2. (SBU) Conference participants discussed several questions related to constitutional reform during the regional meetings held June 30 - July 3, including the form of government. Eighteen regions expressed support for the current system of a unified government, with the caveat that administrative and financial decentralization should be fully implemented. Only four regions -- Diana (North), Atsinanana (East), Analanjirofo (East) and Betsiboka (Center West) -- opted for a federal state in order to increase their level of autonomy and "get away from the Merina (highland) stronghold." Participants in all regions lamented that past regimes had not promoted equal development for all regions, but had rather concentrated the benefits in the capital. Either a federal state or an effective decentralization with administrative and fiscal autonomy were presented as ways in which to avoid uneven development.

¶3. (SBU) Participants also considered the question of the age limit and restrictions for presidential candidates that should be included in the constitution. Most regions recommended that lower and upper age limits be set between 30 and 60 or between 35 and 65 - clearly indicating the pro-Rajoelina slant of the conferences. The change of the current minimum age from 40 to 35 would enable Rajoelina to run for president, while the upper limit would prevent all former presidents - as well as former VPM Pierrot Rajaonarivelo -- from running. Two regions recommended setting no age limit at all, which would allow anyone over 18 to run.

¶4. (SBU) Three regions - Diana (North coast), Atsinanana (East coast), and Betsiboka (Center West) - agreed that the minimum age should remain at 40, surprising observers of this pro-HAT event. [NOTE: Diana is influenced by former President Zafy Albert, while the Atsinanana region is the cradle of the Ratsiraka clan and of AREMA politician Pierrot Rajaonarivelo. END NOTE.]

#### AMNESTY

¶5. (SBU) The issue of an amnesty, which blocked the most recent AU/UN/SADC attempts at mediation, was widely discussed during the conferences. Most regions expressed support for a "general" amnesty

that would cover all acts perpetrated between January 2002 and December 2008. This is seen as an attempt to exclude the Ravalomanana administration from benefiting from an amnesty related to the February 7 shootings. In a few regions, participants called for an amnesty covering the period back to 1991. This would absolve officials from the Ratsiraka administration, who may have been involved in the August 10, 1991 "slaughter." Only the Analamanga region (where the capital is located) chose a "selective" amnesty that would openly not apply to Ravalomanana, with the support of 72% of participants.

#### REQUESTS FOR NEW REGIONS

16. (SBU) Participants from the Southeastern region of Vatovavy Fitovinany proposed that their region be divided into two different ones, based on a natural division. The four districts requesting the change argue that the current regional capital fails to serve the population due to distance and infrastructure issues. Another similar request came from four districts in the South. If those two requests are approved during the national conference, that would bring the total number of regions to 24.

#### LOGISTICAL SNAGS

17. (SBU) Across the board, the organizers were overwhelmed by organizational and logistical problems, with participants more numerous than expected - even double for some regions following an instruction by the HAT of not excluding anyone who may want to participate. Complaints about allowances and catering led to the suspension of the conferences in some regions for hours. Rajoelina himself "confessed" that the HAT had learned some lessons from the disorganization, but rapidly shifted the blame on to the organizing

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committee, composed of civil society members.

#### Comment

18. (SBU) Many observers noted that the conferences were manipulated by the HAT, as the discussions during the meetings seemed pre-determined, and many participants were given forms containing specific talking points. On the other hand, HAT supporters denounced alleged manipulation by the Zafy, Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana movements, which publicly announced a boycott of the conferences, but reportedly sent partisans to influence the discussions and push their agendas on federalism and a general amnesty. The conferences - touted by the HAT as giving a voice to "the people" -- are one more example of the HAT's efforts to consolidate its de facto power and more deeply entrench itself in its present position. The national conference, if held this month, is likely to go further down a unilateral road that increases the divide between Rajoelina and the current opposition. So far, the requirement for "consensus" has given blocking power to those who don't want any agreement at all -- and therefore is tending now to be dismissed by the HAT as an unreasonable or impossible goal. However, to find a tenable solution to the ongoing crisis, there remains the need for a minimum level of inclusion and consensus - lest the chosen way forward not solve anything at all. So far, the HAT remains far from finding that level. END COMMENT.

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